

The True Nature of Servitude (‘Ubudiyya) in Islam



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Jumu'ah Wa'dh delivered at Masjid Noorul Huda Columbia, SC 12/26/2008

Part of a collection of talks inspired by the discourses of His Eminence Al Imam Shaykh
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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Al Hamdulillah Rabbil Aalameen wa salaatu wa salaamu 'alaa Sayyidanaa, wa Shafi'anaa wa Habibanaa wa Mawlaana Muhammadinil Mustafaa, Allahumma Salli wa Sallim 'alaa 'Abdika wa Rasulikan Nabiyyil Ummiyy. Khaatimul 'Ambiyaa-I wal Mursaleen, wa Imaamul Muttaqeen, Wa Qaaidil Ghurriel Muhaajaleen, wa Shafi'il mudhnibeen, Rasuli Raabbil 'aalameen wa 'alaa Aalihi wa Azwaaajihi Ummuhaatul Mu'mineen, wa Dhurriyaati, wa Ahlil Bayti, wa Ashaabih wa Awliyaaihi, wa Ummatihi ajma'een bi Rahmatika Yaa Arhamar Rahimeem wa ba'd

Wa Qal Allahu ta 'ala fi kalaamil qadim ba'da 'Authu Billahi minash shaytanir rajim. Bismillahir Rahmani Rahim.

قُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَسَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ عِبَادِهِ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَىٰ ۚ اللَّهُ خَيْرٌ أَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

Say: Praise be to Allah and peace on His Servants whom He has chosen: is Allah better, or what they associate (with Him)? (27:59)

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

And I have not created the jinn and the men except that they should serve Me.

وَاعْبُدْ رَبَّكَ حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَكَ الْيَقِينُ

Serve your Rabb until (the day of) Certainty comes to you (15:99)

Sayyidinaa Abu Dharr al Ghifari Radhi Allahu 'anhu narrated from the Prophet Sall Allah 'alaihi wa 'alaihi wa sallim that Allah (azza wa jalla) said:

“Ya ‘Ibaadi. I have forbidden injustice for Myself and I have made it forbidden amongst you, so be not unjust to one another.

Ya ‘Ibaadi, You are all astray except him whom I have guided, so seek My guidance and I shall guide you.

Ya ‘Ibaadi, you are all hungry except him whom I have fed, so ask me for food and I shall feed you.

Ya Ibaadi, you are all naked except him who I have clothed, so ask Me for clothing and I shall clothe you,

Ya ‘Ibaadi, you all commit sins, night and day, and I forgive all you sins, so seek forgiveness, and I shall forgive you.

Ya ‘Ibaadi, you are not capable of causing Me harm, so you harm Me not. You are not capable of benefitting Me, so you do not benefit Me.

Ya ‘Ibaadi, if the first of you and last of you, the Men of you and the Jinn of you, were as bad as the most sinful heart among you, it will not diminish one jot of My Kingdom,

Ya ‘Ibaadi, if the first of you and last of you, the Men of you and the Jinn of you, stood in unison and asked Me, and I granted every person what they asked for. It will not diminish what I have, except as much as the needle diminishes the ocean, when it is dipped in it.

Ya 'Ibaadi, these are your deeds for which I make you accountable, and then recompense you for them. Whoever finds good, let him praise Allah, and for whoever finds the contrary, let him blame none but himself. Al Hadith Al Qudsiyyah (Day 127,128)

“O son of Adam, free yourself for My service and your heart will be filled by Me with contentment, and I shall protect you from poverty, if you do not do that, I shall fill your heart with anxiety and I shall not provide for your needs. (at Tirmidhi and al Bayhaqi) (Day 208)

Sayyidinaa Shaykh Muhyuddin Abdul Qadir al Jilani Quddus us Sirruhu says,

“When a person’s servitude (‘Ubudiyya) and direct experience (Ma’rifat) are fully realized, he will say neither “Give me” nor “Do not give me.” He becomes nonexistent (Faaniy). Wholly absorbed (Mustaghriq). This is why one who has attained to this station (maqam) says: “What do I care about me?” Well spoken indeed! I am His slave (‘abd) and the slave in His master’s company has neither choice nor will of his own.

A man once bought a slave (mamluk), and that slave happened to be one of the people of religion (deen) and righteousness (Salaah).

“O slave,” the man said to him, “what would you like to eat?”

“Whatever you give me to eat.”

“What kind of clothes would you like to Wear?”

Whatever you give me to wear.”

“Where would you like to lodge in my house?”

“In whatever place you lodge me.”

“What jobs would you prefer to work at?”

“Whatever you order me to do.”

The man then burst into tears, as he said: “What a blessing it would be for me, if I could be with my Lord (Almighty and Glorious is He) as you are with me!” “O my master,” said the slave, “does the servant (‘abd) in the company of his master (Sayyid) have any will (iraada) or choice (Ikhtiyar) of his own?” Then the master said to him: “You are a free man (Hurr) for the sake of Allah, and I would like you to stay with me, so that I may serve you with my person (nafs) and my property.”

Anyone who really knows Allah (Azza wa Jalla) is left with no choice of his own, and he says: “what do I care about me?” You must not challenge destiny (Qadar) concerning his affairs or the affairs of others. (Jilani)

Al Imam Abdal Karim ibn Hawazin Al Qushayri Rahmatullahi ‘alaihi writes,

“I heard the master Abu ‘Ali ad Daqqaq remark, “There is nothing nobler than servitude, nor is there a more perfect title for the believer than ‘slave’. For this reason Allah (azza wa jalla) said, in describing the Prophet Sall Allahu ‘alaihi wa Aalihi wa sallim on the night of Mi’raj ‘Glory be to the one who brought His Slave by night from the Sacred Mosque’(17:1) Then Allahu ta ‘ala said, ‘And then he revealed to His slave what he revealed’ (53:10). So if there were a title more sublime than ‘slave’, He would have used it for him.... The master Abu ‘Ali ad Daqqaq observed, “just as ‘Lordship’ is an eternal quality of Allahu ta ‘ala so too is ‘servitude’ a quality of man that stays with him as long as he lives.” One of the sufis recited:

If you ask for me I will say, “Here I am, His slave.”

And if they ask Him He will say, “There is My bondsman. (Qushayri)

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ
وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

Indeed you have in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Yawmul Aakhira and who engages in the Dhikr of Allah in abundance. (Suratul Ahzab ayah 21)

Al Imam Qushayri Rahmatullahi ‘alaihi also writes,

“It is said, Servitude is establishing true acts of obedience, performing them without limit, ascribing little worth to whatever you offer, and being aware that your virtuous deeds come only by means of Allah’s prior decree.” It is said, “Servitude is abandoning personal choice in the face of divine decree.” It is also said, “Servitude is emptying oneself of (belief in one’s own) power and might and acknowledging the wealth and blessings He grants you. And it is said, “Servitude is embracing whatever you are commanded to do and separating yourself from whatever you are told not to do.”

Allah Most High says,

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ

“Indeed you (Muhammad Sall Allahu ‘alaihi wa Aalihi wa sallim) you are exalted in your conduct.”

On the authority of (Sayyidinaa) Anas Radhi Allahu ‘anhu, it is related that someone asked, “Ya Rasulullah (Sall Allahu ‘alaihi wa ‘Aalihi wa sallim), who among the believers has the greatest faith?” He Sall Allahu ‘alaihi wa Aalihi wa sallim) replied, “The one of finest

character.” It is clear, then that fine moral character is the most excellent virtue of the servant and the one by which his inner nature is known. Man is veiled by his body, revealed by his character.

The master Abu ‘Ali’ ad Daqqaq (Rahmatullahi ‘alaihi) declared, “Allahu ta ‘ala favored His Prophet Sall Allahu ‘alaihi wa Aalihi wa sallim with many excellent qualities, but He never Praised him for any of his qualities as He praised him for his character, for He says,

“Indeed you (Muhammad Sall Allahu ‘alaihi wa Aalihi wa sallim) are upon a noble character.”

Al- Wasiti stated, Allah described him as being upon a noble character because he sacrificed this world and the hereafter, being content with Allahu ta ‘ala”. He also said, “Noble character means that one neither disputes with others nor is disputed by them because he possesses complete inner knowledge of Allahu ta ‘ala.” (Qushayri)

Allahu ta ‘ala says:

فَإِنْ حَاجُّوكَ فَقُلْ أَسْلَمْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلَّهِ وَمَنِ اتَّبَعَنِ وَقُلْ لِلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ
وَالْأُمِّيِّينَ أَسْلَمْتُمْ فَإِنْ أَسْلَمُوا فَقَدِ اهْتَدَوْا وَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا عَلَيْكَ الْبَلَاغُ وَاللَّهُ
بَصِيرٌ بِالْعِبَادِ

So if they dispute with you, say: "I have submitted myself entirely to Allah and so have those who follow me." And say to the People of the Book and to those who are unlearned: "Do you (also)

submit yourselves?" If they do, they are in right guidance, but if they turn back, Thy duty is to convey the Message; and in Allah's sight are (all) His servants. (3:20)

Allahu ta 'ala also says,

لَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ أَنفُسِكُمْ عَزِيزٌ عَلَيْهِ مَا عَنِتُّمْ حَرِيصٌ عَلَيْكُمْ
بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَءُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ

فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُلْ حَسْبِيَ اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَهُوَ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ
الْعَظِيمِ

Now has come to you a Messenger from amongst yourselves: it grieves him that you should perish: ardently anxious is he over you: to the Believers he is Raufur Rahim (most kind and merciful.)

But if they turn away, Say: "Allah alone is enough for me: there is no god but He: I trust and rely completely on Him and He the Lord of the Magnificent Throne !" (9: 128-129)

Commenting on these ayaah in beautiful verse Khwaja Hafidh Muhammad Yusuf 'Ali Sulaimani Radhi Allahu 'anhu writes,

"Khuda ki ba'd bury he, Karim hasti hai

Kalaami Haqq may, Raufur Rahim hasti hai

Bi khalqi pak, Khuda Ghaffur ka mazhar

Bi khulqi pak, Muhammad Azim hasti hai."

After Allah (azza w jalla), he is the most gracious.

In Allah's True Word (Qur'an Pak), He is Raufur Rahim.

In all of creation he alone exemplifies Allah's Forgiveness.

In the Perfection of good behavior (Ikhlaaq), he is Muhammad, the most exalted

(Sall Allahu 'alaihi wa Aalihi wa sallim).

Al Imam Sultan Shaikh Sayyid Mubarik 'Ali Shah Gilani el Hashimi Hafidhumullah in a discourse entitled, "Adab and Ikhlaq of the Holy Last Messenger (Sall Allahu alaihi wa Aalihi wa Sallim)" says,

"A person who regulates his conduct to Adab or Islamic code of Conduct or Ikhlaq-e-Muhammadi is in fact a friend of Allah, Wali (saint). A person who calls himself a saint but does not follow this Islamic code of Conduct, then he is a Satan in the guise of a saint. An ordinary Muslim who does not identify himself with Ikhlaq-e-Muhammadi is defeating the very purpose for which this world was created, Messengers were sent, and the Holy Qu'ran was revealed. One thing should be remembered that Adab and Ikhlaq-e-Muhammadi are quite opposite to Hindu and western cultures. Hence a true Muslim is one who identifies himself with the Last Messenger of Allah, Sall Allahu alaihi wa Aalihi wa Sallim.

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ

"Indeed you (Muhammad Sall Allahu 'alaihi wa Aalihi wa sallim) you are exalted in your conduct."

The morals, manners and conduct of the Last Messenger of Allah, Sal Allah alaihi wa Aalihi wa Sallim, were perfected by Almighty Allah—who taught him, with a view to educate mankind. According to Hazrat Abu Huraira, Radhi Allahu 'anhu the Holy Last Messenger, Sall Allahu alaihi wa Aalihi wa Sallim, had said, "I have been sent as a Messenger in order to perfect the morals and conduct of mankind." As a matter of fact, certain previous Messengers were links in the chain of human moral evolution which found its culmination in the person of the Last Messenger of Allah, Sall Allahu alaihi wa Aalihi wa Sallim. Allah Almighty is the teacher of the Holy Last Messenger, Sall Allahu alaihi wa Aalihi wa Sallim, in perfecting in him the best of moral conduct—Ikhlaq-e-Hasna. In Holy Qur'an, one sees how the Pupil, Sall Allahu alaihi wa Aalihi wa Sallim, is being taught by The Teacher.

"(O' Messenger) Forgive the wrongs of people and show them the path of righteousness and keep away from the ignorants." [Holy Qur'an]

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ
الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ

"Allah commands you to do justice, kindness and give charity to relatives and forbids you from all acts of lewdness, evil, and rebellion." [16:90]

"(Men of Allah) Control their anger, and forgive people; Allah likes righteous people." [Holy Qur'an]

As a matter of fact, Allah the Most High has revealed his guidance in many forms; first of all He revealed and culminated His revelation in the person of the Holy Last Messenger, Sall Allahu alaihi wa Aalihi wa Sallim, which is contained in the form of a Book called the Holy Qur'an. Hence is known as al-Qur'an-e-Natiq—the speaking Qur'an, Sall Allahu alaihi wa Aalihi wa Sallim.

Similarly Allah the Great, has manifested each and every sign (called verse in English, which is an incorrect translation of Ayat: miraculous sign) contained in the Holy Qur'an in the universe and each and every second he is still guiding mankind through the various aspects of the Holy Qur'an. Therefore, all the aspects of divine guidance are directly concerned with the perfection of humanity. Moral conduct of a man is meant to help him realize his goal—Al-Insan al-Kamil, viceroy of God. Thus, all those who shall follow the path of perfection—Ikhlaq-e-Muhammadi—shall become a beloved of Allah and shall be blessed with very quick results.

"Verily He loves them and they love Him." [Holy Qur'an]

It is the objective of the Holy Qur'an to impart education of etiquette and conduct of the Holy Last Messenger, Sall Allahu alaihi wa Aalihi wa Sallim, so that through him the entire humanity is taught etiquettes and becomes cultured. Hence the Holy Last Messenger, Sall Allahu alaihi wa Aalihi wa Sallim, has said that "I am the Messenger to complete the evolution of perfect conduct." Then the Last Messenger, Sall Allahu alaihi wa Aalihi wa Sallim, educated the people on these lines. When Allah the Almighty had perfected conduct in the person of the Holy Last Messenger, Sall Allahu alaihi wa Aalihi wa Sallim, He said, "Verily (O' Messenger) your conduct is the best." How kind and merciful is Allah, the Almighty that He Himself praises the conduct of his Beloved, Sall Allahu alaihi wa Aalihi wa

Sallim. Educating people the Holy Last Messenger, Sall Allahu alaihi wa Aalihi wa Sallim, Allah appreciates good conduct and dislikes poor conduct. In this connection, Hazrat Ali (Radhi Allahu 'anhu) said, "I fear for that Muslim to whom a brother Muslim came seeking fulfillment of some problem and the former is unable to help him, even though he may not hope for reward and fear of punishment in the Hereafter. Then it is compulsory for him to exhibit good conduct for in it lies his Nijat (salvation)." The Holy Last Messenger, Sall Allahu alaihi wa Aalihi wa Sallim, has said, "I swear by Him in whose hands is my life, that only those with good conduct will enter Paradise." There is a tradition narrated by Hazrat Mu'az bin Jabal that the Holy Last Messenger, Sall Allahu alaihi wa Aalihi wa Sallim, has said, "Allah has made Islam very precise in two things, one Akhlaq-e-Husna, and the other, good deeds."

Briefly the main features of Akhlaq-e-Husna and good deeds are the following:

1. To live together in affection;
2. To perform good deeds;
3. To deal with people humanely;
4. To give alms;
5. To distribute food;
6. To say Salaam extensively (only on Muslims);
7. To visit and care for sick Muslims;
8. To accompany the Janaza of a Muslim irrespective of his being a good or bad Muslim;

9. Always to live in harmony and understanding with Muslims and/or infidels;
10. To respect aged Muslims;
11. To accept an invitation from a Muslim;
12. To extend invitation to other Muslims;
13. To forgive people;
14. To maintain peace and harmony among people;
15. To give charity;
16. To extend Salaam first;
17. To save oneself from Haram things, e.g. dancing, music, singing, backbiting, loose talk, lewdness, miserliness, ill manners.

There is a tradition narrated by Hazrat Anas that the Holy Last Messenger, Sall Allahu alaihi wa Aalihi wa Sallim, has not omitted any good instruction which he has not told us nor has he omitted to mention any defect, which he has not forbidden us or invoked the fear of Allah. The above points are covered in the following Qur'anic Ayat:

"Allah commands (O People) to do justice, charity, and give some of your goods to your relatives and forbids lewdness, evil deeds and unruliness."

Hazrat Mu'az bin Jabal has said that the Holy Last Messenger of Allah, Sall Allahu alaihi wa Aalihi wa Sallim, advised me,

"O' Mu'az, I advise you to always fear Allah, speak the truth, fulfill promises, do not break a trust, be kind to orphans, be considerate to your neighbors, deal softly with people and

extensively do Salaam to them, do good deeds, do not retain great expectation in your heart, remain steadfast in your belief, try to understand the Holy Qur'an, develop love for the Hereafter, have fear of the Day of Judgement, inculcate humility, obedience and modesty. I forbid you to abuse a wise person and intelligent person. Do not call a truthful person a liar, do not obey a sinful person, do not disobey a just ruler, do not create dissension and unrest. I advise you to fear Allah even though you may have nothing more than barren stones. On each sin seek fresh forgiveness, for those committed in private and for those committed openly."

Hence the Master of both worlds is mindful in minute details of Adab and Conduct. He invites people to good deeds in order to make them obedient and cultured." (Gilani)

Rabbanaa taqabbal minnaa, innaka antas Samiul 'Alim. Wa tub 'alainaa yaa Mawlaana, innaka antal Tawwaabur Rahim. Wa Sall Allahu ta 'ala 'alaa Khayri Khalqihi Sayyidinaa wa Mawlana Muhammadin 'Abdika wa Rasulikan Nabiyyul Ummi, wa 'alaa Aalihi wa Ashaabihi wa Ahli Baytihi wa Awliyaaihi wa 'alaa 'Ibaadillahis Saliheena bi Rahmatika yaa Arhamar Rahimeen.

Wa ma 'alaini ilal balaaghul mubin.

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